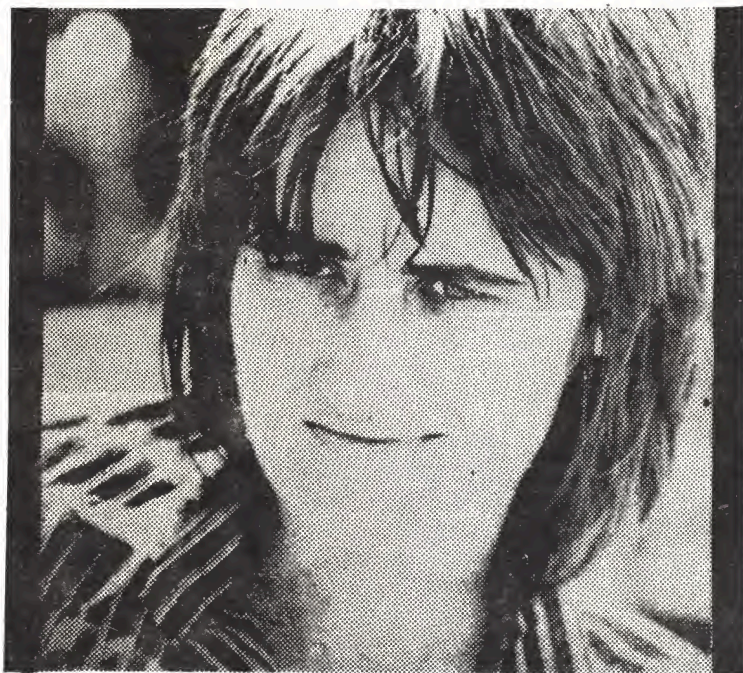


ASTRID PROLL

The case against her extradition



10p

Produced by "Friends of Astrid Proll"

Friends of Astrid Proll

Astrid Proll was arrested on September 15th, 1978, and is now in a high-security wing of Brixton Prison awaiting extradition hearings. She has not been charged with any offence under British law. This pamphlet describes her life in England and presents the case against her extradition to West Germany.

"Friends of Astrid Proll" are a group concerned with the life and liberty of a dearly loved friend, as well as with the wider issues of human and civil rights that her case raises. We do not support the tactics of the "Baader-Meinhof" or any other similar group. We are concerned with a woman who has shown by all her actions and words that she is not a "terrorist", who wishes to put the past behind her and live a different life. We want her to have that chance.

Why she fled from Germany

Astrid Proll was brought up in Kassel, Germany, the daughter of an architect. After leaving school she went to Art College in Berlin to study photography. She became involved in left-wing politics through the 1968 Students Movement, the activity against the Vietnam war, and through working with young people from approved schools in Frankfurt. It was during this period in Berlin that she met other members of the subsequent Baader-Meinhof group.

Her imprisonment

Astrid was arrested in Hamburg in May 1971. She was then held for 2½ years until her trial eventually started in September 1973, in Frankfurt. During this time she was subjected to two periods of sensory deprivation and social isolation in the "silent wing" of Koln-Ossendorf prison (November 1971-January 1972 and April 1972-June 1972, a total of 4½ months). When not in this wing, she was held in solitary confinement, for a total of two years—all before any conviction.

The "silent wing" she describes as being buried alive. She was the only prisoner in the wing (it had 6 cells) and absolutely no sound could penetrate into her cell. Her only human contact was the warders who brought her food three times a day. The only daylight was what could filter through a tightly-meshed wire over a window too high to see out of. The cell and its contents were painted in white oil paint, and the bare neon light was often left on for 24 hours.

Ulrike Meinhoff, who received similar treatment to Astrid, describes it thus:

"It feels as if my head is exploding, the feeling that my scalp will burst, will be torn off . . . it feels as if I am constantly under electric currents, under remote control . . . the feeling of burning inside . . . it's not possible to know if the shivering is from heat or

cold . . . roaring in the ears . . . the feeling that time and space are not two separate things any more . . . the feeling is of being in a vacuum, like being embedded in lead."

Despite this torture and the subsequent attempts to "re-educate" her in the psychiatric wing of the prison, Astrid never once talked to the interrogating police or made any "confession". By the time her trial started, however, she was suffering from extreme low blood pressure and circulatory collapse. She experienced bloodrushes to the head, difficulty in breathing, continual tiredness and could sometimes hardly walk. Dr Schmidt-Voigt, an independent circulation specialist, told the court:

"There is acute danger in two directions. Firstly, through the permanent deficiency of blood supply to the brain, causing an oxygen deficiency . . . leading in the long run to deterioration of thinking ability and intelligence. Secondly, such disturbances act in the same way on the heart muscles and cause nutritional disturbances of the heart muscle cells. This can become permanent and cause irreparable damage. Finally a complete circulatory collapse causes rhythm disturbances and these could be fatal."

He recommended that Astrid was unfit to stand trial, and that only treatment outside prison could avert the danger to her life. The trial was halted, and she was released on bail, first to a sanatorium in the Black Forest, and then to live in Frankfurt. Fearing she would not survive her return to prison, she fled to England.

Though she made a slow recovery here, years later she is still suffering from the after-effects of the sensory and social deprivation she was exposed to in prison. Being alone can bring on terrifying feelings and everyday situations can induce panic or the fear of collapse, as her English friends noticed:

"Getting out of the car, and walking, or sitting in a restaurant could produce a panic and anxiety in Anna that I'd never seen in anyone before."

"One day we were shopping in a brightly-lit supermarket. Anna was already getting agitated by the neon-lighting, when we suddenly heard a sonic-bleeping noise. Anna just collapsed on the spot. I had to take her out immediately, she was holding my hand like a little child, and was distressed and shaky for hours."

The charges against her

At her trial, Astrid was charged with two attempted murders arising out of an incident in Frankfurt in 1971. At the time of writing these are the grounds on which the West German authorities will try to extradite her, though they may also press other charges in connection with bank robbery. In the Frankfurt incident, it is alleged that shots were exchanged when the police recognised and gave chase to two suspects in the street. No one was either hit or hurt. It should be noted that the German police are very ready to claim attempted murder charges. The Chief Attorney remarked in 1967, "If someone is hit with a truncheon by a police officer and disarms the officer and hits him back, they should prepare themselves for a charge of attempted murder." (Source—Verboten 1)

The prosecution and defence in Astrid's trial have never been fully heard since the trial was stopped, but it now appears that the prosecution had great difficulty in providing

evidence. A recent article in "Der Spiegel" (29.9.78) said "... the most severe accusation, that Astrid Proll shot at two plainclothes policemen, couldn't even be proved convincingly at the time because the inquiring authorities were holding back witnesses present at the scene ... they (the plainclothes police) were only allowed to give restricted evidence ... the prosecution curtailed the hearing of witnesses and therefore the possibilities of legal judgement, in an unconstitutional way." There were rumours later that the judges wanted to throw the case out.

Astrid's life in England

In a letter to a friend from Brixton prison (30.9.78), Astrid writes:

"The main thing I have to fight is being put back into the top-terrorist bracket. The reality surrounding me here just tells me that. I am the top prisoner here, everybody, prisoners and staff are complaining about the tightening up of security. That's what I was fearing most. In Germany it will be even worse because I can be connected to all the old names. During all the last years I have never chosen to give interviews out of the dark, to call upon people: 'Throw away your guns!' because a figure like that is just a paper figure, she or he is big business for the terror market, it doesn't add to her/his perspective, it holds her/him back. Instead I trained on EEC money (in a Skill Centre) and tried to do something differently. *I did it*. People say now: the practice is not enough, I have to open my mouth on what I turned my back on."

What did she do here?

Astrid came to England partly because she could already speak the language, and partly because here she could lead a different political life, one that did not involve any kind of armed or violent activity. She got married and tried to establish her life here as Anna Puttick. She got work first as a gardener in a park, and then decided to train as a car mechanic. She completed a 6-month Government retraining course—the only woman amongst dozens of men—and then obtained a City & Guilds certificate through studying in evening classes. She then worked for nearly a year as a fitter's mate in a toy factory in Hackney, as a member of AEUW. Many of her friends and workmates have spoken about her life here:

"At work, Anna had to cope with the suspicion, ribaldry and loneliness that comes with being the only woman in a traditionally male job. At Lesney's (the toy factory) some of the men wouldn't work with her because she was a woman, and one of the supervisors was always really down on her. Anna is an inspiration to me, and to other women, in her determination to fight this sex discrimination and not let herself be discouraged."

Astrid next worked for ten months, until she was arrested, at the North London Vehicle Workshop, as an instructor on a scheme for training unemployed school leavers:

"She was very good at her job and all the lads liked her—she would enjoy a joke with us all ... Anna is about the last person you would expect to be involved in violence of any kind. On the contrary, she goes out of her way to help people rather than hurt them. Only last Tuesday when a student here failed his examination at a local technical college, she took the trouble to go down to persuade the authorities to let him sit the exams again."

Astrid met many women who through the womens' movement were trying to come out of their isolation as wives and mothers:

"When I met Anna, she was still at the Government training centre and had little spare time, but she'd pop in from next door. The children would be in and out of her house at the weekends, she'd be delighted on the occasions they stayed the night there because she revelled in their company and because it left me free. That was about neighbourliness rather than individuals isolated behind their front doors . . . I saw her being in England as settling down, not into inactivity, on the contrary laying down real roots, putting all her energy into her work: into friendships: into the squatting and local community as a whole. She was acutely aware of what was going on around her, like the Bengali families who had been sold empty houses by racket profiteers, whose children didn't go to school because



their parents didn't speak any English. She told me of student groups she had worked with in Germany, who went into the migrant communities and worked with people, 'the dispossessed ones', in terms of giving them some respect so that they had a chance to be themselves . . . Now I am totally amazed that she could love other people, relate so directly and with so much energy, after the conditions she endured in prison in Germany."

"Anna moved into the house I was living in and gave me and my child enormous support . . . she took a lot of responsibility for the children regarding education, security and welfare. One of my children (Tony) has a very strong relationship with Anna. She gave him so much time and energy when he needed it most, even after a hard day's work."

"As a woman, her influence on me has been her total lack of respect for the usual confusion and powerlessness that women particularly can be prey to. I think it is to her greatest credit that she has never been a comfortable person to be around."

"She would sometimes ask me why I chose to identify with my weakness rather than my strength. She knew very well how it is often easier to remain oppressed and how essential it is not to".

Astrid also ran a car maintenance class for women:

"She was very clear and thorough at explaining how engines worked. She really wanted

other women to learn what she knew. She demystified cars for me—not just the knowledge and practical skill involved, also how to use a spanner right, not being uptight about getting dirty, always finding a way round something if it didn't come right first time. She would just keep going at it."

Only her closest friends noticed the intense strain she was living under. She faced the pressure of having always to conceal her real identity, which made any situation or any person a possible threat to her, as well as the strain of her shattered health. Add to this all the more normal problems of exile—finding work and friends in a foreign culture, bearing the pain of separation from her family and the friends she was closest to in Germany, with whom she had no contact at all

"I was at first terrified when I saw the stress that was constantly operating on her, but at the same time I was impressed by her beauty and intensity."

"Sometimes I couldn't believe that she kept going day after day, first at the factory then in the workshop (garage)—jobs that were really demanding. But she did. And she really entered into the world of the kids at the garage—saw what they were up against, appreciated their energy and stropiness."

For Astrid, training as a car mechanic, and studying for further qualifications in mechanics and welding, was the basis of her new life in England; her friends and workmates want her to continue that life.



What she faces if she is returned to Germany

Although the charges against Astrid date from seven years ago, and bear no comparison with recent acts of "terrorism", in Germany she will still be branded as a "top terrorist" and her new life here is likely to be ignored. She will be linked in the public eye with violent crimes with which she has no connection, and in the current atmosphere of fear and reaction in Germany, there is serious concern about how she will be treated if she returns.

Trial and prison conditions

If returned, Astrid is likely to spend another long period on remand before she is brought to trial. There are substantial grounds for believing that she will not receive a fair trial, given the recent interference in the legal rights of defendants. Special courts have been set up to hear "political cases", which are run by carefully selected judges. The prosecution can now compel defendants and witnesses to make statements without a lawyer present and letters between lawyer and client can be intercepted and examined at the prosecution's discretion. Police have raided lawyers' offices and seized defence documents. Defence lawyers have been banned for protesting at the treatment of their clients in prison, and replacement lawyers refused an adjournment to prepare their case.

We fear that, if convicted, Astrid will receive a heavy and vindictive sentence which will reflect the recent escalation of terrorism, and the current political atmosphere in West Germany, rather than anything she is alleged to have done.

She will also be returned to the same inhuman prison conditions which were nearly fatal to her in 1974. Her circulatory condition is still poor and liable to deteriorate rapidly, as has already become apparent during her few weeks in Brixton Prison. In addition, the new 1977 Contact Ban Law allows the German authorities "after the proper assessment" to deny a prisoner any contact with family, friends, or even a lawyer. Prison visits now take place through a thick glass screen so that no touch or natural sound contact is possible.

Public support for Astrid will be difficult

In West Germany today there has been an increasing erosion of civil liberties so that any protest can be termed "anti-constitutional" and people can be prosecuted, for example, for drawing attention to prison conditions. In 1975 two people who distributed leaflets describing the solitary confinement of Baader-Meinhof suspects were sent to prison for six and nine months. Kurt Groenewold, a defence lawyer who attempted to describe his clients' prison conditions, was also brought to trial in a manner that was internationally condemned (by, amongst others, the Haldane Society and the New York Centre for Constitutional Rights).

Members of the public who might be sympathetic to Astrid's case will be inhibited by the fear of losing their own jobs. Under the Berufsverbote (job bans) 1½ million people have been investigated and thousands banned from public service jobs of any kind (including postmen, teachers, train drivers, local government officials) because their "loyalty to the constitution" is in question.

When arrested in London, Astrid said: "I do not expect to survive if I am returned to Germany." Of the early members of the Baader-Meinhof group with whom she is associated, eight have met their death in prison. The others who are now free are living ordinary and peaceful lives; we want Astrid to have that opportunity rather than the threat of illness and death in prison.

"Friends of Astrid Proll" oppose her extradition to West Germany for the following reasons:

- She has spent the last four years in Britain leading a legal and constructive life, and has made many friends who do not want to lose her.
- There are many grounds for believing that she will not receive a fair trial in Germany, given the current operation of the legal system there, as well as events since 1971, in which she has had no part.
- Without being convicted, she has already spent nearly three years in prison, including two years of solitary confinement and four months of sensory deprivation. This experience nearly killed her. We are frightened for her life should she be sent back to Germany.
- Extradition of Astrid Proll would amount to an endorsement by the British Government of the continuing erosion of civil liberties in West Germany.

Astrid Proll will be fighting her extradition by legal means through the courts, and, if necessary, by appeal to the Home Secretary. "Friends of Astrid Proll" wish to publicise her case as widely as possible. We also wish, in the event of her being extradited, to create a campaign of international concern and support for her in Germany. We welcome the broadest possible support.

You can help by: — affiliating to the campaign, either as an individual or as an organisation

- making public statements of support for Astrid, passing union resolutions
- sending donations for campaign costs to "Friends of Astrid Proll"
- writing to newspapers, MP's, etc., speaking on radio phone-in programmes
- collecting signatures for our petition
- putting up posters in your place of work

"FRIENDS OF ASTRID PROLL", 109 Backchurch Lane, London E.1.
Cheques to F.A.P. Acct. No. 50062315 Coop Bank, Leman St., E.1.